

## From Aunt Olivia's Kitchen

## Grand and glorious 4th

by Lydia Lovell

Fourth of July? Why, this holiday was almost as important as Christmas or Thanksgiving! It far outshone Hallo-we'en or my birthday. Fourth of July marked, in every way, summer's arrival. Never mind that June 21 had come and gone; never mind that we might already have had some of the warmest days of the year; never mind that schools let out over a week ago. Summer didn't really-and-truly start until the Fourth of July.

In those long-ago years, summer visitors seldom came down to the Cape until the weekend before the fourth, and summer shops didn't take the shutters off their doors or put displays in their windows until summer visitors were expected. Osterville's movie theatre scheduled no shows until the weekend before the fourth. Had a person imagined that, someday, parking spaces in the village might be at a premium, folks would have questioned his sanity.

In the final days of June came a change. Wherever one looked, bustling activity announced the season was about to begin. Fresh paint gleamed on trim, washed and polished window panes glittered, new-mown grassy strips surrounded newly-planted pansy and petunia beds, and hedges, sheared straight and level, stood at attention. Everyone felt optimistic about business picking up, for with summer visitors came a transfusion of dollars to Cape Cod's economy.

While the summer season continues to bring increased business to the Cape, beginnings and endings of that season are blurred now. Tourists arrive throughout the year on weekends, and visits of longer duration are commonplace from April through Thanksgiving. And because our year-round population has doubled, re-doubled, then doubled again and again in the past 50 years, only a few shops close at all, and those which do, lock up only for a couple of months between New Year's and Easter.

Another difference is that nowadays people with summer homes usually have had them opened and readied in May, and have been in residence for weeks before Independence Day. Retired people who spend winters in the South begin returning to the Cape shortly after Easter and many remain here well into October. The season has proved itself elastic beyond anyone's expectations, for we well-remember when summer was but ten weeks long, beginning with the Fourth of July and ending promptly on Labor Day.

Along with optimism, along with excitement of summer hops re-opening and summer residents arriving to occupy

their cottages at the beach, and along with the quickening tempo of activity, came the holiday itself . . . plenty of reason to celebrate! The grand and glorious fourth marked Independence Day and, since the Lovells were especially proud of being independent Americans, we celebrated.

To assure joy and hilarity filled the day, Aunt Olivia issued annual invitations to all the family to attend a Fourth of July picnic, and from all points, as though drawn by a magnet, the clan gathered rain or shine. Uncle Henry was ready, were the weather inclement, to set up tables in the barn and to fly a tarpaulin over the outside fireplace so hot dogs and hamburgers could be grilled and rolls and buns toasted. Although all hoped for a sunny day, eating in the barn, playing hide-and-seek in the shadowy empty stalls, climbing into the hay mow, still sweet-smelling with wisps of hay, was no hardship.

Once the invitations were out, preparations to feed the crowd began. Because she was well-organized, Aunt Olivia turned to her lists, saved from year to year inside the front cover of her Fannie Farmer's "Boston Cooking School Cook Book. Just how much would be needed to feed between 50 and 60 people of all ages was carefully recorded as follows:

|                              |                            |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 4 doz. hot dog rolls         | 15 qts. milk               |
| 3 doz. hamburger buns        | 1 lb. coffee               |
| 3 1½ lb. loaves white bread  | 1 lb. sugar                |
| 2 1½ lb. loaves wheat bread  | 2 qt. mayonnaise           |
| 2 1-lb. loaves oatmeal bread | 3 bunches celery           |
| 2 lbs. butter or margarine   | 2 lb. onions               |
| 2 cans ripe olives           | 4 1-lb. jars sweet pickles |
| 4 jars green olives          | 5 heads lettuce            |
| 2 jars mustard               | 15 lbs. hamburger          |
| 2 jars pickle relish         | 15 lbs. hot dogs           |
| 2 5-lb. canned hams          | 1 15-to-18 lb. turkey      |

An unwritten rule pertaining to participation in the Fourth of July picnic was that each family brought enough dessert to feed at least as many as they numbered. After the main course and salads had been consumed, all desserts were dished up, and everyone helped himself.

Aunt Olivia stuffed and roasted the turkey on July 3; on the morning of the fourth, Uncle Henry carved the bird, sliced the ham, and laid the fire over which the dogs and burgers would be grilled. Many of the guests, of course, were children, so plenty of milk was available while hot coffee awaited their elders, along with a variety of canned and bottled root beer, orangeade, sarsaparilla, and birch and ginger beer. These beverages were kept cold in the ice-filled galvanized wash tub Uncle Henry had brought from the laundry shed for that purpose.

While the turkey roasted on the day before the party, Aunt Olivia, my mother, and I, with the help of my brother, combined energies to make potato salad for the entire crew. In our biggest kettle, the one usually reserved for boiling lobsters, we put fifteen pounds of scrubbed-but-not-peeled white potatoes and enough water so they wouldn't burn.

After boiling for 25 minutes, the potatoes were fork-tender, and three of us grew expert in removing skins from hot potatoes impaled on two-pronged forks. Brother's part was dicing them into our largest bowl, an old-fashioned wash bowl. While they were still warm and we were still skinning each layer of cubed potatoes was doused with cider vinegar. We used between ¾ to a full cup of vinegar. After sprinkling the potatoes with 3T. salt and 2T. oregano, we stirred in 2 C. mayonnaise and ¼ C. prepared mustard; then we set the mixture aside to cool.

Into a somewhat smaller bowl went a dozen hard-boiled eggs . . . shelled and sliced . . . a cup of chopped green peppers, 2 C. chopped celery, and 1 C. onions, chopped fine. When cold, the potatoes and vegetables were combined, salt, pepper, and mayonnaise adjusted for texture and taste, and the potato salad refrigerated.

That evening, Mother and I prepared **Three Bean Salad** in a big bowl, mixing five cans each, lima beans, kidney beans, and green beans, drained, with three small cans pimientos, drained and sliced. Then, to a cup of red wine vinegar in a medium saucepan, we added two or three bunches of scallions chopped fine, three crushed cloves of garlic, ¾ t. each of dried basil, dried tarragon, and black pepper, and a tablespoonful of salt. We brought the vinegar mixture to a full boil, covered it, and let it cool to room temperature before pouring it over the beans. Into the refrigerator went the bean salad to marinate overnight. A cup of olive oil stirred into the bowl in the morning was the finishing touch.

In final preparation early on the morning of the picnic, we mixed a great bowl of fruits, using both canned ones, drained, and whatever fresh ones were obtainable. To them we added marshmallows snipped into small pieces, a jar of maraschino cherries, and, if we could find them, a few bunches of seedless green grapes. Today you can buy miniature marshmallows and skip the tedium of snipping up the large ones with scissors dipped in confectioners sugar to keep them from sticking.

By the time the Lovell families gathered at four in the afternoon, Uncle Henry and Father and my brother had the tables set up, paper plates and picnic-ware arranged, and the fire just right for grilling. As each automobile pulled into the driveway, the women and older girls hurried to pitch in, making sandwiches, filling relish trays, splitting buns and rolls; everyone worked hand-in-hand while talking, visiting, laughing. The menfolk gathered in bunches, exchanging news, helping whenever they were needed, carrying heavy trays laden with food, and keeping an eye on the activities of the excited children.

After everyone had eaten his fill, after all sweets had disappeared, and after the remarkably few leftovers were wrapped and put away, dusk came creeping across the lawns, stars began winking through the treetops, and lightning bugs were flashing and flickering in the shrubbery. Sleepy little ones climbed into their mother's laps . . . older children played in the shadows . . . while all waited for full darkness and time to start the fireworks. That moment came eventually. Uncle Henry put on the show with rockets and sparklers and marvels of light and sound that filled the sky as we watched, awestruck, until the last flare zoomed into the night and burst thunderously overhead in a shower of brilliance.

At last the picnic was over. Tired but contented, the family dispersed, calling thanks and farewells into the darkness. That's the way the Lovells celebrated Independence Day . . . in a fine old-fashioned American fashion.